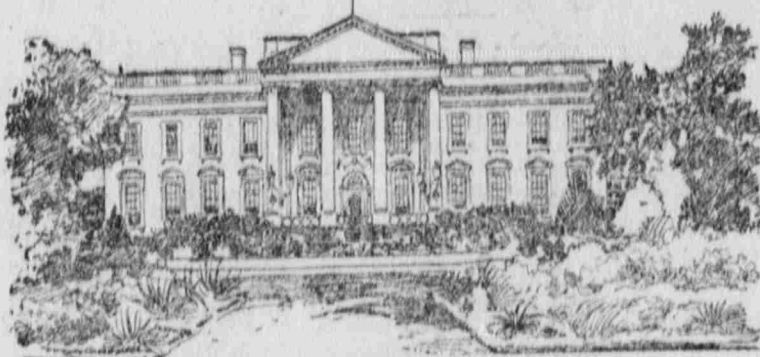


Wit and Humor of Lincoln



BY HUBERT NORTHERN

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MR. LINCOLN'S career exemplifies the truth and aptness of the poetical trope that "man is a pendulum between a smile and a tear." He at one moment being given over to the abandon and license of unrestrained humor, and immediately thereafter being plunged into the Cimmerian darkness of the most dense and impenetrable melancholy. What he felt and experienced during the remembrance of the latter condition will never be known or even intelligently conjectured. His somber mood was the voiceless tomb of expression and confidence, but he shared the zest and exhilaration of his excursions to the shrine of Thalia, or the fane of Joe Miller with all mankind.

So far as dignity and the fitness of things are concerned, the outside world might consider that he missed jokes and business too intimately. It certainly does not appear fitting that he should introduce the first reading of the emancipation proclamation to his cabinet with Artemus Ward's story of a "high handed outrage at Utica," but we can't know to what extent the strain of formulating so mighty an event was neutralized by a brief sojourn in the realms of nonsense.

Equally doubtful, if true, was the propriety of his alleged response to Lord Lyons upon the diplomatic encounter to announce the incident of international import—the marriage of the Prince of Wales. To the formal speech of the ambassador announcing the august event he replied to the bachelor minister, Lord Lyons, go thou and do likewise. If such an incident happened, it is not garnered except by the left hand of history, but it is strictly Lincolnian and might well have happened anyway. Great and solemn occasions did not repress or deaden his propensity to joke. Thus at the Hampton Roads conference, as he and Seward entered at one end of the small cabin of the steamed River Queen, he saw the diminutive Stevens at the other end in the act of emerging from a huge overcoat.



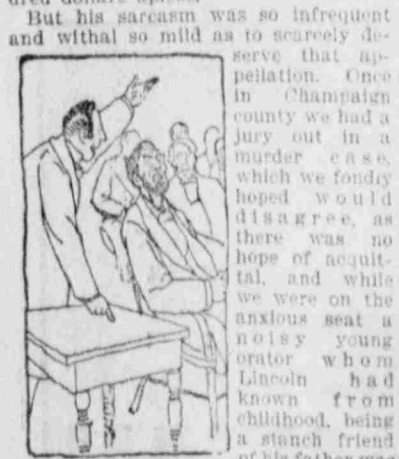
"Lord Lyons, go thou and do likewise."

history, and therefore I refer you to Seward for details. But I do not forget the precedent you cite is that Charles lost his head in the end. That was answering a fool according to his folly and is the best instance of apt repartee on record.

Now, the essence of the first of these River Queen jokes was pure fun and nothing else, while the essence of the last one was strictly utilitarian—was absolutely demanded by the situation. It put Hunter and his troop of outcasts of the ring, "put him to sleep," to use modern slang. It ended the Confederate's function completely. But he sometimes went further in vanquishing an opposition than the bounds of good humor required. Thus, when a Confederate or rich man from New York waited on the President in a dark hour of the nation's tribulation, begging for a gunboat to protect New York harbor, he manifested the utmost impatience and almost paralyzed them with this reply, "I am straining every nerve to meet the requirements of the army and navy at the front, and I have no gunboat to give you; but if I was half as rich as you half a dozen men are fondly scared as you pretend to be I would furnish the gunboat myself instead of begging the government for what it ain't got to spare."

He very rarely made either himself or any else a butt for a joke, and certainly never in malice. His humor was usually impersonal. Once, however, at City Point a little discussion arose as to what religion Hallock, I think, preached. "I think he's an Episcopalian," said Lincoln, "because he swears just like Seward does, and Seward is an Episcopalian."

More in unison with his methods was his story to illustrate why he did not fill certain vacancies, thus: A boy was making a church out of mud. Having got it substantially completed, he was asked why he did not make a minister for it. "Kase I hain't got no mud left," was the obvious answer. In a similar vein, when a dash of the enemy cost the government three brigades and a lot of army mules, he lamented the loss of the mules, explaining that he could replace the mules by a dash of the pen, but that the mules would cost well on to a hundred dollars apiece.



"I wish he would quit."

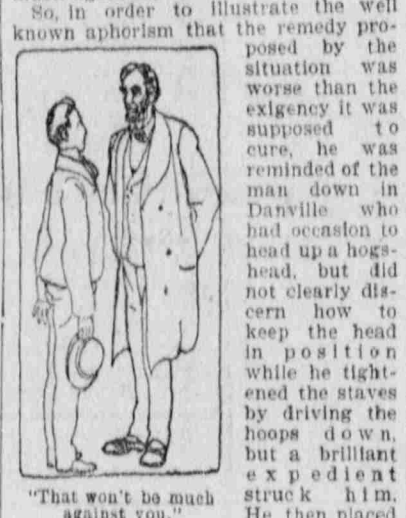
"Whiskey" case, when Lincoln, bored beyond endurance, said, "I wish he would quit, for I'm afraid the jury will agree so as to get here to hear that speech." But this bit of sarcasm was richly deserved.

In like manner during the war the persistent claims of some pretentious Union men for forage, etc., taken by

the army reminded him of Captain Jack Chase, who used to pilot a small boat through the rapids of the Illinois river. While in the very midst of the boiling current a small boy tugged at the pilot's coat and shouted, "Cap'n stop de boat, for I've lost my apple overboard!" "Trivial matters amused him equally with those of greater significance. A long experience with wit and badinage had not made callous or blunted his sense of the ludicrous. Thus at the Bloomington convention he had occasion to introduce the courtly, polite, exultant, drooping to the coarse, irrelevant Wentworth. "I've heard much of you," began the prize, "I—much against me, I reckon!" blurted out the boor. Lincoln was wont to laugh over this very often.

Many of his stories were conceptions of the situation in hand with something that happened down in—somewhere. "That's like the man down in Indiana" was the frequent introduction. Thus, when after a long interval of silence he received news not altogether favorable from Burnside, beleaguered at Knoxville, he neither lamented at the untoward aspect of the news nor enthused at getting news at all, but simply said, "That's like the man down in Indiana who had thirteen children, that were accustomed to stray out into the woods, from the depths of which would occasionally float on infantile cry of disaster, when Sally would exclaim, 'Thank heaven, they're one of my children, what ain't dead yet!'"

In order to illustrate the moral uncleanliness of certain unsavory politicians he was reminded of a "feller" who applied to a physician for advice in and about a cutaneous disease. He needed a very simple remedy, so a prescription was given him somewhat thus: "R. Sapon, castile, oz. 8. Aquapure gal. 12. M. Mix. Apply to all parts of the body with a sponge, and who dry with a towel." "That simply means washing me!" exclaimed the dirty sufferer. "It certainly is open to that objection," replied the physician.

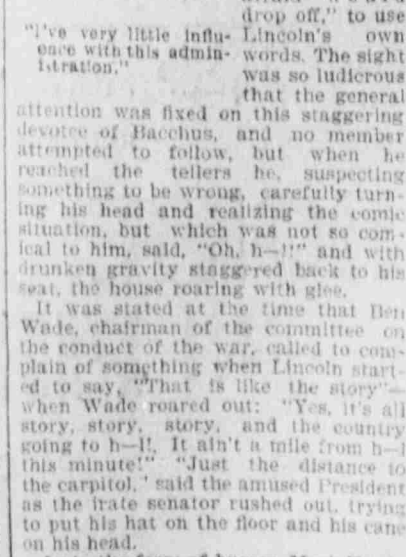


"That won't be much against you."

In a similar vein he took the starch out of a vainglorious applicant for a minor office who, in order to magnify his importance, gave in quite unnecessarily the suggestion that he sprang from one of the leading families of Vermont. "Never mind," said the jokester President, "that won't be very much against you."

So, in order to illustrate the well known aphorism that the remedy proposed is often worse than the situation was worse than the situation was supposed to cure, he was reminded of the man down in Danville who had occasion to head up a hog-headed, but did not clearly discern how to keep the head in position while he tightened the straps by driving the hoops down, but a brilliant expedient struck him. He then placed his young son in the hoghead, where his height just served to keep the recalcitrant head in place, when he adjusted the head properly, and the experiment seemed to be a success till the imprudent boy yelled, "Let me out of here!"

Once he came in official contact with Judge Baldwin, the author of the humorous book so highly prized by Lincoln. "Flush Times in Alabama," had known who his distinguished visitor was his reception would have been different, for the President cherished a real humorist above all men. The judge was born and bred in the Shenandoah valley and migrated first to Alabama, where he wrote this book; thence to California, where he became chief justice of the state, and, seeking in 1861 to revisit his childhood home, came on to Washington and applied first to Justice Field, then to Hallock, both of whom he well knew, to gain the needed permission; but, being circuitously rebuffed, he was ordered on an important matter a puddy, bibulous member started in a situation, but when he reached the tollers he suspected something to be wrong, carefully turning his head and realizing the comic situation, but which was not so comical to him, said, "Oh, h—!" and with drunken gravity staggered back to his seat, the house roaring with glee.



"I've very little influence with this administration."

attention was fixed on this staggering decree of Bacchus, and no member attempted to follow, but when he reached the tollers he suspected something to be wrong, carefully turning his head and realizing the comic situation, but which was not so comical to him, said, "Oh, h—!" and with drunken gravity staggered back to his seat, the house roaring with glee.

It was stated at the time that Ben Wade, chairman of the committee on the conduct of the war, called to complain of something when Lincoln started to say, "That is like the story—when Wade roared out: 'Yes, it's all story, story, story, and with me going to h—!' It ain't a mile from h—' this minute.'"



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



Lincoln's Hard Road To Success

BY H. C. WHITNEY

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The usual and ordinary belief is that the career of the ultimately successful man is an uninterrupted and unbroken series of current successes from zero to affluence or renown. In practice, however, it appears that the progress of the successful and unsuccessful alike is strewn with current misfortunes, humiliations, checks and disasters, and that the adventurer who shall have attained the goal of ultimate defeat may nevertheless have been highly favored of fortune in life's journey, while the laureled victor may have trodden the wine press of humiliation and defeat all of his days but the last.

Mr. Lincoln's career as a business man may be thus summarized: After practicing law and living in the most frugal and economical manner for a quarter of a century, being meantime his own hostler and errand boy and attending to his own woodpile, coward and pigpen himself, he had accumulated \$10,000 worth of property when he was elected as President of the United States, and having consumed his capital for current uses in living during the months preceding the inauguration he was compelled to borrow every cent of money which he had in his pocket when he started to Washington and which he repaid out of the earliest receipts from the presidential salary.

On Jan. 5, 1859, the day of Douglas' last election to the United States Senate by the Illinois legislature, I was alone with Mr. Lincoln from 2 o'clock till late bedtime, and I feel authorized to say that no man in the state was so gloomy, dejected and dispirited, and no man so surely and heartily deemed his life to have been an abject and lamentable failure as he then considered his life to have been. I never saw any man so radically depressed, so completely steeped in the bitter waters of hopeless despair. The surroundings, even, were eloquent of flat, prosaic failure. I found him utterly alone and sitting in an old rocking chair doing absolutely nothing but brooding over his griefs and political discomfort. He was in his office, one of the most neglected and ungarnished offices in the state.

My feelings were in unison with his, and our conversation was a serious and dismal as the somber and shadowy surroundings, and yet in twenty-two months from that doleful and gloomy day this recipient of fortune's frowns had sounded the highest note in the gamut of ostensible and apparent success, for 1,857,510 citizens, embracing the elite of the nation, had elected him to be the ruler of 40,000,000 people.

And his early career as a politician may be thus exhibited: On April 21, 1832, he was elected to his first office

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spontaneous. Reaching town, he sought out the residence of his enthusiastic friends, where he found him working with his drawknife, while his wife was industriously getting dinner for their distinguished guest. After dinner Lincoln and his improvised host started for the grove which was to be the scene of the meeting, their way leading through the village. The man was almost staggering under the weight of the flag and its staff, and Lincoln did not realize the ludicrousness of the situation until he heard some of the town people commenting upon the "long procession." It being Lincoln and his solitary friends, each of them being over six feet tall, but there was no meeting. The town, being composed chiefly of Kentuckians, rejected his political ideals and by preconcert systematically and unitedly kept away.

I will now afford a glimpse at the obverse face of the medal. Within a few days after the inauguration of President and a young friend in front of the fireplace, in which was a heart of fire, in the executive office at Washington. I had called to ask that his ship to sign land patents. Strange days and yet he appeared quite as cheerful and gloomy as on the 4th of January, 1859, heretofore narrated. He had the press and political of some early acquaintance, and his sensitive nature was stirred to its profoundest depths. It was singular that so virile and courageous a nature in grave matters about comparative trifles. He concluded our interview in these identical words. "It is an awful thing to say, but I wish I was back home in peace and some one else was here in my place."

Lincoln's Appearance.
Lincoln was as unusual in personal appearance as in character. He was muscular in frame, 6 feet 4 inches tall, and weighed about 180 pounds. His hair was black and luxuriant, eyes brown, nose long and mouth large.

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